

ASHINGTON

Urban District Council.

ANNUAL REPORT

FOR 1901,

BY

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Printed by order of the District Council.

HIRST :

PORLAND HOUSE PRINTING WORKS CO.

—
1902.



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MR. CHAIRMAN AND COUNCILLORS,

I beg to submit my Sixth Annual Report :

During the past year the total number of deaths registered as occurring in the district was 326, of which 166 were males, and 160 females.

According to the census taken in the earlier part of the year, the exact number of the population of the district was 13,914, 6,282 resident in Ashington, and 7,632 at Hirst. But as month after month the number of births largely exceeded the number of deaths, in addition to a large influx of population owing to the unceasing erection of new houses in the Hirst ward, it is manifest that by the middle of the year the actual number of inhabitants must have been very much more than at the time of the census, and therefore, in calculating birth and death-rates, &c., I have taken the estimate of 14,000 as more nearly representing the population.

According to this estimate the death-rate for the year was 23.28 per thousand, as against 16.28 in 1900. The unfortunate increase in the mortality was due to the exceedingly large number of deaths during the autumn months, owing to the wide spread and peculiarly virulent epidemic of "Summer diarrhoea" which then prevailed, and also to some extent to the deaths as a result of the outbreak of Enteric fever which followed it.

Throughout the first six months of the year the mortality was extremely satisfactory, for the number of deaths during that period was at the rate of only 13.85 per thousand living per annum, which is considerably below the average for the country as a whole. But, in contrast to this, the indicated rate for the remaining six months was 32.57 per thousand.

Included in the list of deaths are six cases of accident, which reduces the figure to 22.8 per thousand, and by eliminating in addition, 22 instances of a fatal result from "prematurity of birth," the death-rate from disease was 21.28 per thousand.

Since the formation of the Urban District in 1896, the death-rate for each year was as follows :—

YEAR, 1896	TOTAL MORTALITY,	17.8	CORRECTED	Do.,	17.4
.. 1897	"	17.8	"	"	16.6
.. 1898	"	16.3	"	"	15.4
.. 1899	"	18.5	"	"	16.8
.. 1900	"	17.45	"	"	15.17
.. 1901	"	23.28	"	"	21.28

Of the 326 deaths, 98 occurred in the Ashington Ward, and 228 in the Hirst Ward. Calculated on the census returns of the proportion of the population resident in each ward, this makes the death-rate at Ashington only 14.96 per thousand, while at Hirst it was 29.87 per thousand, or almost exactly double that of Ashington.

This is a very striking and extraordinary disparity, and one which demands very serious consideration. There is no doubt that, to some extent, it is accounted for by the fact that at Hirst the population is largely made up of young, married couples, and consequently there is a high rate of birth, and a high birth-rate means a high death-rate, because it brings into the population a large number of infants whose rate of mortality is high. But even allowing a fair margin for this, there must be something radically wrong when in one village the death-rate should be double that of another immediately adjoining it where the social conditions are exactly the same.

In the monthly reports I have frequently commented on the narrow thoroughfares, the want of external air space, and the abominable arrangement in so many instances of ashpit and privy in connection with the houses in the Hirst Ward. To anyone compelled to be familiar with the rows in certain portions of that locality during hot summer weather, a high rate of mortality does not cause surprise. Outside the sultry, stagnant air, inside the foul, reeking atmosphere, rendered, if possible, worse by any attempt at ventilation through opened windows, for it means, in many cases, only the more easy entrance, not of pure air, but of malodorous vapours laden with pestiferous germs from the collections of decaying organic and refuse matter only a few feet away. For this condition of affairs the Urban Council is not responsible. It is of recent origin, and had to take matters as it found them. But there must be something still sadly wanting, when, at this time of grace and multiplicity of Sanitary Authorities, it should be permissible to build such a place as Hirst to be a death-trap for all time. I am aware that in many old colliery villages the rows are to be found placed equally close together, but in such cases the houses almost invariably were, originally, at least, of the low, old-fashioned one storey type, and consequently causing much less interference with the free circulation of air than the higher two-storey buildings at Hirst.

It is unfortunate that we do not know the proportion of births occurring in this ward as compared with Ashington, but next year it would be advisable to ask the Registrar in his return to differentiate between the births in each ward, which would enable us to determine how much of the mortality at Hirst is associated with a higher rate of birth, and make a more faithful comparison of the health conditions in the two divisions of the district.

The subjoined table shows the age mortality for each month :—

Ashington Urban District. Age Mortality. 1901.

MONTH.	Males.	Females.	All Ages.	Und. yr.	1 to 5 yrs.	5 to 15 yrs.	15 to 25 yrs.	25 to 65 yrs.	65 yrs. and Upds.
January ...	10	13	23	6	4	1	1	9	2
February ...	10	5	15	9	2	2	1	1	0
March ...	7	8	15	7	1	1	0	2	4
April ...	10	4	14	9	1	1	0	2	1
May ...	11	10	21	6	4	1	0	7	3
June ...	2	8	10	5	0	0	0	4	1
July ...	9	12	21	13	1	1	0	4	2
August ...	31	29	60	40	10	1	0	4	5
September	30	24	54	26	8	0	4	13	3
October ...	20	21	41	19	9	2	7	3	1
November ...	12	7	19	5	5	0	6	3	0
December ...	14	19	33	7	15	1	2	7	1
Totals ...	166	160	326	152	60	11	21	59	23

Unfortunately this year proves no exception to the rule of an ever-increasing infantile mortality. For although the proportion of infant deaths to the total mortality is no higher than formerly, being slightly less than one-half—*i.e.*, 152 to 326—the total number of infant deaths has increased from 115 in 1900, to 152 this year; the rate per thousand population has increased from 9 to 10.8, and the rate per thousand children born, has increased from 200 to 233.8.

The appalling figure of 83 deaths from diarrhoeal disease alone fully accounts for this increase, and of the 83, 61 were under twelve months of age. The very widespread and virulent character of the epidemic of "Summer Diarrhoea" which raged in the late summer and throughout the autumn was, in all probability, associated with the excessive heat of some portions of the summer, and the nature of the soil in our district, by parting slowly with its heat, probably conduced to prolonging the period of activity of the specific cause of the disease. On this occasion too, adults appeared to be almost equally liable as children, although a fatal termination in the case of grown-up people was of comparatively rare occurrence, 4 instances only being recorded between the age of 25 and under 65 years. In two more above the age of 65, advancing years probably predisposed to the fatal issue.

One very conspicuous and remarkable characteristic of the affection was the fact that the Diarrhoea was in almost every

instance of a distinctly "dysenteric" type, the motions containing a large quantity of blood, frequently consisting entirely of blood and mucus, suggesting the conditions generally associated only with tropical countries, and scarcely to be expected in a temperate climate.

Epidemic Diarrhoea is always most virulent and fatal in conditions of overcrowding with an insufficiency of pure air, and particularly where there is wanting free circulation of the external air, as in the back-to-back dwellings, and in the well-like courts of the poorer portions of large towns, and as might be expected, the number of deaths in the Hirst ward was largely in excess of that in Ashington, although, no doubt, the comparatively larger number of infants and young children in that locality would account for a certain proportion of the excess. Of the 83 fatal instances, 66 were at Hirst, and 17 only in Ashington.

I have frequently before referred to the very great harm resulting from the improper feeding of infants and children, and more especially the disastrous effect of an injudicious diet during an attack of diarrhoea, but, as unfortunately, this practise of permitting unsuitable articles—occasionally through ignorance, but more frequently owing to mistaken kindness on the part of parents and friends—appears to be quite universal as ever, I hope before the advent of another season to take advantage of your permission to issue to every house printed leaflets of simple instructions and directions for the dieting and care of infants suffering from this disease which every year proves such a scourge in your district.

In addition to 152 deaths at an age less than one year, there were 60 between the age of one year and under 5 years, and almost an equal number, *i.e.* 59 during middle age—from 25 years up to 65 years.

In boyhood, at an age between 5 years and 15 years, 11 instances are recorded; 21 in young adult life (from 15 to 25 years), and 23 had attained to more than 65 years.

The accompanying table indicates the various causes of death throughout the year, and the comparative frequency of each.

The number of deaths from consumption is greater than in 1900, 12 having occurred as against 9 last year, but from "other tubercular diseases" there were 22 in 1900, and 21 this year.

The Zymotic mortality, including under the term deaths from Scarlatina, Enteric Fever, Measles, Whooping Cough and Epidemic Diarrhoea, was very high, amounting to 9.5 per thousand of the population. This was due partly to the excessive mortality from diarrhoea, and also to the severe outbreak of Enteric Fever during the latter part of the year. From other forms of contagious disease the district was comparatively free. Nine cases only of Scarlet Fever were notified, and one of Diphtheria.

ASHINGTON URBAN DISTRICT.—CAUSES OF DEATH, 1901.

Ashington Urban Council. Notifications of Infectious Disease, 1901.

Month.	Scarlat- ina.	Enteric Fever.	Erysip- elas.	Con- tinued Fever.	Croup.	Diph- theria.
January ...	2	7	1	1	0	0
February ...	0	0	1	0	2	0
March ...	0	0	1	0	0	0
April ...	0	0	0	0	1	0
May ...	0	0	1	0	0	0
June ...	2	1	2	0	0	0
July ...	0	2	0	0	0	1
August ...	1	18	1	1	0	0
September	0	42	1	5	0	0
October ...	2	100	1	3	0	0
November	0	22	0	1	0	0
December	2	10	0	2	0	0
Totals ...	9	202	9	13	3	1

As I gave full statistics of the Typhoid epidemic in a special report, it is unnecessary to do so again, but I would like to remark that the question of how best to deal with the yearly recurrence of Enteric, and especially how to prevent a repetition of the unfortunate experience of this year, in the loss of so many young lives, appears to me to be of the most paramount importance. And it becomes a matter for the most careful and serious consideration what can be done to infected houses and premises to diminish, so far as possible, the chances of infection persisting, and becoming again active at some future time. As for Mersey Terrace and Pont Street, where the disease appeared to concentrate itself, the whole area must have become so saturated with infection, that were in not for the social misery entailed in so many families suddenly becoming homeless, apart from the loss in property and effects, one could almost wish, for the sake of the public health, that a fire might break out which would destroy houses, privies, and ash pits in one general conflagration. This, like the great fire in London after the plague, would be the most effectual means of disinfection. For we must remember those houses have all been recently built, have only quite recently become occupied for the first time, and as we cannot determine the exact origin of infection, there must be always the possibility that however thorough our method of disinfection, it may not cover the original source.

But this is no reason why we should not do all we can to destroy the germs of infection in connection with those premises. And in this connection, I may point out that fumigation alone in any instance, is not sufficient for that purpose. For it has been proved that gaseous fumigation, however thoroughly done, with the most approved agent, and after the most approved method, is not a safeguard, although doubtless a valuable help. I would, therefore, suggest that after every emptying, or at least, for a number of times, the ashpits and privy space should be thoroughly sprayed with Bi-chloride solution, and subsequently the sides pointed afresh, and the floor space cemented. In the case of the houses themselves, all paper already on the walls should be removed, and burnt, and every wall thoroughly lime-washed, corners and crevices having special attention. Woodwork, painted surfaces, &c., to be washed over with the antiseptic solution, and all basement floors laid with cement concrete rammed solid. Piggeries, pigeon-pens, and all additional and superfluous outhouses, should be removed and destroyed, and the spaces occupied swept, garnished, and sprayed. Attention must also be paid to the sinks, which after being emptied, should several times be plentifully flushed with antiseptic solution.

All this may seem a large order, but the matter is of such serious moment, that any measures at all practicable, which are likely to be a means of preventing another epidemic, if not actually resulting in an immunity from Typhoid Fever, cannot be regarded as either unnecessary or superfluous. And it is evidently in the direction I have indicated such preventive measures must proceed, for we have, at least, the satisfaction of knowing that the more usual cause of Typhoid outbreaks, *i.e.*, an infected milk or water supply, is absent in this instance. On the appearance of the disease several samples of the drinking water, taken from those parts of the district where cases were most numerous, were, by order of the Sanitary Authority, submitted to analysis, and found to be above suspicion, while exhaustive inquiry carried out by the County Medical Officer failed to reveal any circumstance in connection with the milk supply to suggest a connection in the relation of cause and effect.

The number of births registered during the year was 650, an addition of 75 to the figure for last year. Of the number, 306 were males, and 344 females.

Ashington Urban District. Births, 1901.

Month.		Males.	Females.	Total.
January	...	32	34	66
February	...	29	23	52
March	...	22	25	47
April	...	32	22	54
May	...	26	33	59
June	...	17	28	45
July	...	21	26	47
August	...	30	29	59
September	...	27	32	59
October	...	25	32	57
November	...	24	34	58
December	...	21	26	47
Total		306	344	650

Several important improvements have been effected throughout the year, the most useful of which perhaps was the framing of byelaws, which will be forwarded to the Local Government Board for approval. It has also been decided to proceed to the erection of an isolation hospital, and the contract has already been let, with the stipulation that the building be completed by the end of June. This is a step which will have the highest commendation of all Sanitary Authorities and experts, but to anticipate that given a hospital there will be no more outbreaks of infectious disease, would be but to court the bitterest disappointment and disillusionment, and I have an impression that a decided prejudice against removal to hospital will be found among a large section of the community, which, among other things, will militate against the usefulness of such an institution, so that, although a standing reproach will be removed, the actual effect on the health of the district remains to be seen.

The section of main road from Cooper's shop to Woodhorn road-end has been put in a state of thorough repair to be handed over to the County Council.

Additional street gullies, to the number of about 35, have been put in for the further improvement of surface drainage, and five extra lamps have been added to the public lighting system.

The water supply, both as to quantity and quality, has been quite up to the standard of former years, but scavenging in some quarters has not been at all performed with the commendable efficiency of previous times, complaints as to infrequent emptying being frequent and numerous. Nor do the rapidly-enlarging mounds of ashes and refuse matter add to the appearance, nor are they likely to conduce to the improvement of the general health of the district, and for this reason the Urban Council have under consideration the advisability of erecting a destructor for dealing with ashpit and household refuse.

In conclusion, Gentlemen, I very much regret to have to present so unfavourable a report for this year. I would have very much liked had it been otherwise, but there is no getting over facts. The one element of satisfaction perhaps revealed, is in the fact that for the first half of the year the death-rate was under 14 per thousand, which affords a gleam of hope that in more favourable weather conditions, and with better fortune in the matter of epidemics, this very satisfactory rate may continue throughout the entire year. And it is also somewhat encouraging to find that in so large and so purely colliery a village as Ashington, notwithstanding those same unfavourable circumstances, the total mortality should be only 14·96, although the combination with Hirst makes the district as a whole appear in so unenviable a position.

Trusting you will accept my warmest thanks for your unfailing courtesy, consideration, and kindness to myself.

I remain,

Your Obedient Servant,

A. BLAIR, M.O.H.

